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### Compatible Creativity: Is the Bologna Accord good for European Craft?

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## *Craft Education in Europe*

With a dwindling selection of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in craft theory and practice in Canada, Europe presents an exciting opportunity to study in a variety of institutions and countries, surrounded by old world heritage, high end galleries and first class cities. But what does it actually mean to 'study in Europe?'

### *Why study in Europe?*

The last decade has seen significant change in the European education landscape. Significant efforts have been made towards implementing a pan-European education standards framework through the Bologna Process (1999), but marked differences still exist between countries, since education remains a national responsibility, and is not under the direction of the EU. The aim of the Bologna Process, named after the declaration signed in Bologna by a consortium of European Education Ministers from 29 countries, is essentially 3 fold, ensuring:

- Easily readable and comparable degrees organised in a three-cycle structure (e.g. bachelor-master-doctorate). Countries are currently setting up national qualifications frameworks that are compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area and define learning outcomes for each of the three cycles.
- Quality assurance in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).
- Fair recognition of foreign degrees and other higher education qualifications in accordance with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention.<sup>1</sup>

The rationale for such an ambition is outlined in the original Bologna Declaration:

"We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions."<sup>2</sup>

### *Supporters and detractors*

The goals outlined in the Bologna Process do not have wide support across Europe, even when, at present, 46 countries have ratified the agreement. In most cases, it is understood that the 3 main points outlined above allow for a greater sense of cooperation across European institutions based on mobility, equality and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/about/>, June 30, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main\\_doc/990719BOLOGNA\\_DECLARATION.PDF](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/990719BOLOGNA_DECLARATION.PDF), June 30, 2009.

transparency, but it also is perceived as undermining some key aspects of regionalism, which is of key concern to creative industries, including the crafts. The problems are multifaceted, and complex. Erik Spiekermann, an ambassador for the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, in a recent interview with EurActiv, discusses that the results-based directive required by the Bologna Process is stifling creativity since benchmarking standards inherent in a credit-based system is ill-equipped for measuring artistic or innovative development.<sup>3</sup>

Measurement within the Bologna process, managed through the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is based on learning outcomes and competencies. This presents serious challenges regarding the development of tacit based skills within creative education. It is not at all clear how one measures quality of work within the creative professions outside of the norms of agreed aesthetic conventions. This has long been an issue within art and craft education, and any attempt to make cross-cultural assessment is bound to be rife with problems. As Spiekermann points out, the credit system only enables strategic learning by demonstrating what is necessary, and leaves little room for students to develop deep learning. As any materials based crafts practitioner knows, time with materials in a studio environment, learning through mistakes and developing a personal awareness of what is possible is difficult to teach, let alone measure. In what way this standardization of learning will impact the creative professions is not yet clear, though there are some serious concerns about the impact it will have.

Another issue that faces the Bologna Process is regionalization. Within Europe there are almost as many languages as countries, and education at all levels is usually delivered in a nations' mother tongue. In some areas, for example, the Netherlands, many masters courses, and some bachelors level education, are migrating to English language instruction to accommodate students coming from other parts of Europe and abroad. This assumption that English should be the preferred language of instruction presents difficulties on two fronts. In the first instance, countries such as France do not feel obligated to offer instruction in English, forcing students from other countries within Europe either to have a strong command of the host language, or spend significant amounts of time studying intensive language courses aside their full time studies. In the second instance, in countries such as the Netherlands, where English is being adopted, it requires significant training of teaching and research staff in order to obtain a significantly high standard of English, which is not always the case. In either situation, the result is that learning and teaching are impacted. In a field such as craft where there is significant technical jargon associated with materials and process, students and teaching staff will need to find ways to communicate what needs to be learned, and how this can be taught, through a common 2<sup>nd</sup> language.

In a position paper drafted by the European League of the Institutes of the Arts (ELIA), specific issues concerning regionalism are clearly of concern to educators within the field:

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.euractiv.com/en/innovation/creativity-ambassador-bologna-process-stifling-creative-thinking/article-183387>, June 30, 2009.

The arts provide unique, creative modes of inquiry - ways of thinking, working, making and problem solving - which are of immense benefit to everyone. Actors, architects, artists, dancers, designers, film makers and musicians continually challenge the traditional concepts of sight, space, sound and society, transforming them and providing new meaning.

We believe in the potential of the Bologna process, and strongly support the European ministers, who in seeking greater comparability and readability of qualifications as the platform for a stronger, more integrated European space of higher education, also place emphasis on retaining cultural diversity.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that ELIA understands the potential benefits of a European Higher Education Area, however, are sensitive to the fact that what makes the creative industries, such as the crafts, particularly strong is linked to regional and cultural interests that may be lost given wide-spread standardization.

### Summary

Creative Arts education within Europe has become a competitive business with aims of innovating and operating on the global stage. The benefits of a pan-European framework allow for the mobility of students and teaching staff to experience and learn from the heritage and cultural diversity of others. This holds promise for craft education, allowing free movement across borders to allow for the exchange of knowledge and skill. The downside is the potential loss of the cultural and regional diversity that is critically important to the survival of the crafts in exchange for standardized, transparent methods of education and assessment. On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bologna Process, there are still no clear answers but much enthusiasm and many questions.

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### More information?

- European Universities Association -- <http://www.eua.be/>
- Bologna Process News -- <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/news/>
- ELIA (European League of Institutes of the Arts) -- <http://www.elia-artschools.org/index/>

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.elia-artschools.org/publications/position/position\\_1.xml](http://www.elia-artschools.org/publications/position/position_1.xml), June 30, 2009.

- ERASMUS (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) -- [http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc72\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc72_en.htm)

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## Images for Craft Education in Europe...

### Image 1

Ramon Beaskoetxea (Spain), "Masculinity II", 2009. Blown glass, electroformed copper. 70cm x 15cm x 15cm. Photo credit: John K. MacGregor, eca.

Ramon is a graduate of the Glass MFA programme at the Edinburgh College of Art (eca), Scotland.

*"I chose to study in Edinburgh because it was a chance to improve my English, and it also offered me opportunities that I would not have found in Spain."*

### Image 2

Malin Källman (Sweden), "Darwin – Spatial Escapism", 2009. European maple, epoxy coated steel. 170cm x 100cm x 187cm. Photo credit: John K. MacGregor, eca.

Malin is a graduate of the BA Hons Product Design programme at the Edinburgh College of Art (eca), Scotland.

*"To stay in Sweden would have been the safe option...here I have learned independence and through other students been exposed to an array of cultures that have enriched my work".*

### Image 3

Beatrice Brovia (Italy), "EX VOTO", 2009. wax, textile. 35cm x 39cm x 8 cm. Photo credit: the artist.

Beatrice is a graduate of the Corpus+Jewelry MFA programme, Konstfack, Sweden.

*"I do believe you only gain the chance to grow both as individual and as professional, when you let your "baggage of knowledge" collide with something new...in a way I gained more independence as well as a wider space to reflect upon my own practice..."*

### Image 4